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COMMENTARY

NATIONALISM: ENEMY OR ALLY?

Can Democracy Afford the Internationalist Fetish?

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ONE of the queerest phenomena of the 20th century has been the cult in America and Britain of "internationalism." Despite the teaching of Woodrow Wilson, who rightly saw that national self-determination is a precondition of political and economic liberty, we have come to associate progress with the formation of supra-national unions and to treat nationalism as a sentiment unworthy of the progressive mind, or even as an enemy of democracy. The young men of the Oxford Union

who, on a famous occasion in 1932, refused to fight "for King and Country," would have been ready to die for the League of Nations, and some of them did die fighting in Spain with the International Brigade. But at that time they felt that a war fought to defend the nationhood of Great Britain would be a futile—possibly even an unjust—war.

Such sentiments are not nearly so strong today—at least in Britain. Now that our own independence is gravely endangered by economic and strategic weakness, we are beginning to realize that national self-determination is the most priceless possession of a free people. Our associations with other nations—whether in Western Europe, in the Commonwealth, or across the Atlantic—are undertaken with the object not of transcending nationalism, but of creating conditions in which the British nation can survive. When ECA experts tell us that we must federate with Western Europe or take the consequences, our instinctive reply runs as follows: "We are not prepared to sacrifice our basic freedom for the sake of an economic theory, or even as the price of dollar aid. We would rather starve on our island than be forced into the prison of an artificial super-state. Alliance? Yes. Military integration? Yes. Internationalization of public utilities, such as transport and power? Yes. But each step must be designed not to

IT USED to be the hope of men of good will that our epoch would see the end of nationalism, and that some form of world union would replace traditional sovereignties. Instead, as RICHARD H. S. CROSSMAN here points out, none of the current supra-national ideologies, whether democratic or totalitarian, has been able to supplant nationalism, which seems almost everywhere resurgent. But should we view this development as necessarily retrograde, and nationalism as always and inevitably reactionary? On the contrary, Mr. Crossman suggests, national revival may well prove—at least in some crucial instances—an ally of democracy and a valuable counterforce to the march of Communism. Mr. Crossman is a Labor member of Parliament and an editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*. He is the author of the widely read book *Palestine Mission*, and of a volume on the political philosophy of Plato. His most recent article in COMMENTARY was "Did FDR Escape Wilson's Failure?" in the November 1949 issue.

abolish nationhood but to defend it. Nations are not industrial concerns, which can be amalgamated at will in order to increase their efficiency and profitability. They are living organisms out of which individual freedom grows. Destroy the nation, and you destroy freedom itself."

I do not wish to suggest that nationalism is not frequently a reactionary force, and an obstacle in the way of human progress. Certainly it can take obnoxious forms, as, for instance, in the persons of Hitler or Stalin, Sir Oswald Mosley or Senator McCarthy. Often enough, it may well become a drag upon progress, and hysterically achieve a curtailment of human freedom. The other day, for instance, the Economic Commission for Europe published a report on steel production, which showed clearly enough that the sum total of all the national steel production plans of all the European countries, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, will almost certainly result in a European surplus of eight million tons by 1953, which can only bring the threat of unemployment, price-cutting, and ruthless competition to all the nations concerned. If each of us seeks to be self-sufficient in steel, all of us will be bankrupt. Or again, consider the problem of the so-called "hard core" of the displaced persons: two hundred thousand victims of German nationalism, nearly five years after the defeat of Hitler, are still languishing in camps in Germany. And why? Because no country to which they want to go is ready to receive them. This is a second example of the reactionary effect of nationalism, a xenophobia caused by the fear on the part of the trade union movements and the professional associations in each country that an influx of cheap immigrant labor will undermine their own standard of life.

But it is wrong to conclude from the excesses of nationalism that it is always and everywhere reactionary. In fact, nationalism is a necessary and creative concomitant of real popular liberty. A state ruled by a small capitalist or Stalinist oligarchy, or by an aristocratic elite, can always be more inter-

nationalist, more one-world minded, than a state where the masses really have their say. The more the common people take over from traditional ruling elites the decisions which affect their lives, the more divided and varied will the pattern of human life in the world become. Nationalism, in fact, is an essential stage in the self-assertion and emancipation of man. In its modern form it really began when the Protestant countries, including Britain, revolted against the world order of the Middle Ages. Henry VIII was the ancestor of Marshal Tito. Its second wave came when the American revolutionaries revolted against Britain, and the ideas of the French Revolution overthrew the divine right of monarchs. In its third wave, nationalism came as the Russian revolution against Western capitalist domination, and in its fourth wave, the wave which is now undermining the foundations of both the Eastern and the Western blocs, it is the self-assertion of the millions in Asia and Africa against white ascendancy, whether that white man be a Russian commissar, a British proconsul, or an American oil magnate.

Nationalism, when it is healthy and democratic, is never purely nationalist. Every national, democratic revolution is also a social revolution, a struggle of the underprivileged inside each nation against exploitation by the elite. Seeking security and status, the underprivileged reorganize the economy of the state in a struggle to achieve full employment, fair shares, and equality of opportunity. But in so doing they tend to transform their nationalism into isolationism. The Left is internationalist and fired with the ideal of the brotherhood of man so long as it is in opposition. The testing time comes when it achieves power. Then, far too often, it uses that power not merely to destroy privilege within the nation, but to maintain or establish a privileged position for the nation over against the community of nations. And just because the Left is democratic and expresses the fears of the masses, who know little of other countries, it finds it especially hard to sacrifice national interests

for the sake of an international society. The American worker, fighting for his Fair Deal, wants to use the taxes he pays for improving the conditions of the Americans, and not for loans to other nations; the British worker, determined to maintain full employment, suspects any plans for European union which would give the foreigner free right of entry to his country; and the Russian Communist, who long ago, when he was in illegal opposition, planned for an international order, has become more suspicious of the foreigner, more fearful of contact with him, than the most reactionary landowner or capitalist. The danger of the national democratic revolution, which always begins as an emancipating, liberating force, is that it will finish up in the dead end of chauvinist self-sufficiency.

WHEN we look at the present world conflict against this background, we realize that nationalism is the ally and the enemy of both contestants. Russian Communism, for instance, has now entered a phase of Napoleonic nationalism. But the more the Kremlin seeks to integrate Russia's allies into a larger Russian-controlled economic and political unit, the greater the tension inside the Communist world. The more, under the pressure of the cold war, it tightens its grip on the satellite Communist parties, the more the nationalist dynamic, on which Communism relied in its revolutionary phase, is turned against Russia itself. That is the lesson of Titoism. Tito is the national Communist who wants his Communism to be for Yugoslavia, and though his military power may be small, he is relying on an elemental force which in the long run is more powerful than the Red Army. Hence the paradoxical position that Communism is no longer an integrating force inside the Eastern bloc. Where the Red Army has never been in occupation—in the Far East, for instance, and in Africa—it still has the power to disintegrate an empire or an effete order. But it is fast losing its power to unify a new Communist world—except by brute force.

This failure is all the more remarkable because Russian Communism originally had an enormous opportunity. It appealed not only to the proletarian class within each state but to the proletarian nations; and it could offer them a revolutionary short cut to emancipation and modernization which was not available to the Western democracies. If the Kremlin could have given Tito "dominion status," if it could have treated Poland and Bulgaria as Britain treated Canada and South Africa, conceding to their demands of sovereignty and retaining leadership by sacrificing power, the Russians might have created a world Communist society. They will fail to do so, and they will end in disintegrating their own empire, because their Marxist philosophy prevents them from realizing the historic fact that, when matched against each other, nationalism nearly always defeats class war.

The great strength of the Western democracies is that they are not blind to this fact. Indeed, they all accept national self-determination as the foundation of their freedom. This is why America is still fundamentally isolationist, undertaking reluctantly, and without ideological conviction, her vast overseas responsibilities. It is because Americans really do not want to dominate other nations or impose a philosophy on them that the Atlantic Pact is a less unstable unit than the Eastern bloc. It is because Britain understood the force of nationalism and voluntarily abdicated from empire that India, Pakistan, and Ceylon—the only bulwarks of Western civilization in the Far East—have remained within the Commonwealth.

THE conclusion is clear. Our resistance to Communism will be successful wherever we have nationalism as our ally. Some Americans had hoped that Marshall Plan aid would lead to a European super-state, transcending national sovereignty. In fact, it has achieved precisely the opposite. It has enabled the nations of Western Europe to reconstruct their national economies. Quite literally, Western Europe has been "re-

stored" on the 1939 pattern, and this means that the immediate postwar danger that it would be absorbed into the Russian bloc has been averted.

Even in Western Europe, however, Communism remains a powerful force wherever it can combine an attack on social injustice with an appeal to national sentiment. Here the contrast between France and Western Germany is immensely significant. Economic conditions in Western Germany, with nine million refugees and two million unemployed, are a good deal worse than those in France. Yet, whereas the French Communist party is immensely powerful, in Western Germany Communism has been reduced to trivial proportions. The difference is due to the fact that German Communism represents the acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line, of the Polish claim to Breslau and the Russian claim to Koenigsberg. As such, it is unpatriotic. In France, on the other hand, the Communists, who denounce the Americanization of French culture and harp on the American intention to re-arm the Germans in collusion with the men of Vichy, can still claim to be a party of National Resistance. Where we have been able to make a really nationalist appeal—in Greece, Finland, and Austria—the Communists have been routed. But they have retained their strength in Italy because Togliatti has combined an attack on flagrant social injustice with an appeal to national independence.

DOES this argument imply that we shall have to exploit the spirit of nationalism in order to make Germany and France tough allies in the cold war? Are General de Gaulle and some neo-Nazi German leader to become the twin defenders of Western European culture against Communism? These are legitimate questions. Nationalism—particularly when it is combined with anti-Communist hysteria—degenerates only too easily into fascism, particularly in a country like Germany, which has no stable democratic tradition. But this obvious danger should not make us dismiss any and every revival of German national feeling as a re-

vival of Hitlerism. The good German democrat must resent the partition of his country and the rape of Breslau and Koenigsberg. To desire a unified Germany is not a sign of original sin, but a healthy symptom of German recovery, provided that the Germans who desire it renounce war and totalitarianism as the instruments for achieving their ends. The Weimar democracy collapsed partly because the German democratic parties allowed themselves to be the passive executors of the Versailles Treaty. As a result, the Nazis and nationalists were able to identify democracy with treason and patriotism with totalitarianism. If he is to fight the revival of fascism, the German democrat today must uphold the principles of the Atlantic Charter as they apply to Germans, and must claim that in any Western union the Germans must be treated as equal partners. We may not—indeed, we should not—be willing to grant this claim so far as regards defense, but to abuse the Germans for making it, is simply to play into the hands of the Kremlin. The Schuman plan is the best thing which has happened to us since Mr. Marshall's Harvard speech, because it shows that the French have at last realized that the Germans can only become good Europeans if their neighbors are prepared, in the interests of enlightened nationalism, to make the same surrender of sovereignty which they seek to impose on the Germans.

It is, I believe, the abject failure of our appeal to nationalism which explains our defeats in the Far East. Here Communism not only caters to empty bellies, but is a popular movement against Western imperialism. Among the colored peoples, racial inequality is at least as effective a breeding ground for Communism as poverty and disease, since it provides the intelligentsia and the more idealistic section of the ruling class with a motive for siding with social revolution. Indeed, it is only where the educated classes are ready to lead the workers and peasants that Communism becomes really dangerous. What differentiates the position in Western Europe from that in Asia

is the fact that, in the former case, for national reasons, the educated classes are mainly anti-Communist, whereas in Asia nationalism drives them to school with Marx and Lenin. A young professor of economics in Peking may possibly calculate that American dollars would do more to solve the social problem than a Chinese Communist regime. But this rational calculation is pushed aside by his patriotic hatred of Western imperialism. American aid is received as an insult by any nation which has not already fought and won its own war of national independence against its own George III. And even those nations whose nationhood has been secure for centuries will resent assistance if it is accompanied by demands for any form of union which seems to threaten their sovereignty. As democrats, we are all isolationists at heart.

But this does not mean that we can afford to wallow in our isolationism. A stable world cannot consist of selfish nations, each planning its economy in reckless disregard of the others, and extorting all it can in every economic negotiation. Just as Russia may well destroy its empire by the imposition of a ruthless discipline in defiance of nationalism, so the Western democracies may well destroy their freedom by permitting it to degenerate into anarchy. When Wendell Willkie wrote *One World*, he was right in one respect: in order to maintain our national self-determination, we must accept a unified economic order in which the richer nations systematically assist the poorer and backward peoples. If the American worker is to make the Fair Deal for which he strives a stable Fair Deal, he must help to organize a world Fair Deal. If the British worker wants his British socialism to be permanent, he must help to organize a world of full employment and fair shares, in which the colored peoples take a full and equal part.

LET me sum up my conclusions.

1. The great lesson of the last three years is that the only idea strong enough to compete with Russian Communism is that of a strong, popular nationalism. We can see it

working for us on the other side of the Iron Curtain in tiny Finland, in the Russian Zone of Austria, and, above all, in Yugoslavia. We can see it working against us in the Far East.

2. Any suggestion that the United States intends to use the big stick in order to wind up the untidy mess of European nation-states and to replace it by a neat, efficient, federal super-state plays into the hands of the Kremlin. Sandwiched between two hostile non-European powers, most European nations today would like to be neutral if they could. Since this is impossible, they look westward, and not eastward, because they believe that assistance from America does not involve accepting a foreign way of life, or submitting to political and economic integration ordained from outside.

3. Primarily, Europeans detest Communism not because it is communistic, but because it has become a weapon of Russian imperialism. We resent Communist parties less for the doctrines they preach than because they take their orders from a foreign power. American foreign policy has tacitly recognized this in its handling of Yugoslavia. Instead of "containing" Communism here, it is seeking to split Communism by helping Tito's national Communism to defend itself against Russian Communism.

4. If the cold war is to be won, it is vital that this major amendment of the Truman doctrine should be made an explicit principle of Anglo-American policy. Our declared aim should be not to contain Communism, but to contain Russian imperialism. We are opposed to Communism in our own countries; but we accept the right of other nations, with quite different social problems, to establish Communist regimes, provided those regimes are genuinely independent and respect the rights of other nations to their own forms of government.

5. Outside Europe—immediately in the Far East and, later on, in the Middle East and Africa—it is probable that revolutionary dictatorships will be established as a transitional stage to modern national democracy. Our aim must not be to stop this social and

national revolution, but to prevent it from falling under Russian domination. We must remember our own infancy as nations and the excesses of our own revolutions. We cannot, without violating the whole idea of democracy, seek to impose free enterprise on collectivist countries, or parliamentary institutions on peoples who lack the centuries of development which our specialized form of Western democracy requires. The colonial and colored peoples must be given the freedom to make all their own mistakes, and they must be convinced by the Western world that we respect their demand for national self-determination, even if it takes social revolutionary forms.

The mental readjustment required for such a redefinition of our foreign policy is, of course, enormous. Anti-Communism is an ideology almost as vulgar and easy to swallow as Communism itself. Moreover, just like Communism, it provides a rationale for the aggressiveness and contempt for human rights which is instinctive in both dominant nations and dominant power groups. It is always tempting, when you

have the power to do so, to force others to be free according to your own definition of freedom, instead of tolerating the growth of freedom through its adolescent phase of social and nationalistic violence. Yet, as British history teaches us, a great power which yields to this temptation is guilty of imperialism, however much it may persuade itself that its intentions are purely defensive.

I am convinced that the world-wide spread of the idea of nationalism is already sufficiently strong to prevent world empire by a single power, or even by an agreement between great powers. The strength of a great power today resides in its industrial potential, in the number of divisions at its disposal, and in its stockpile of atom bombs. But in the long run this mere physical strength avails nothing against the obstinate resistance of national democracy, the protest of the peoples against an imposed uniformity, whether Communist or anti-Communist. Our supreme job in the cold war is to insure that this democratic demand for nationhood and social justice can be fully satisfied inside the Western world.